



UNION POWER

NTUI

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January- February 2014

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EDITORIAL

The National Sample Survey and studies based on it now clearly indicate that employment is simply not growing fast enough to match the growing labour force and that the new jobs that are being created are predominantly of low pay. Although there is also evidence to show that there have been small (3 percent) increases in rural real wages over the past 5 years, the situation still persists that at least 60 percent of working people do not earn the minimum wage. Hence, although real wages have risen marginally, wages of the largest number remain below the minimum wage and the small incremental rise of the real wage is much too small to pull wages above the minimum wage.

The downward drag on wages is sustained at the one end by severe underemployment, in particular in agrarian and other rural employment, and at the other, through integration with the global supply chain. Further, downward pressure has been brought on by linking wages to productivity through the extensive and increased use of the piece rate. The piece rate, which was used predominantly for home based workers earlier, is being now employed in even the factory sector as well as in public health and urban services. Workers in garment factories, municipal workers (in garbage collection and street cleaning), health workers (ASHAs) are all today employed at a piece rate. The third source of the drag down on wages is the ubiquitous use of contract labour at much lower wages in both the public and the private sector, replacing regular workers. Fourth, the largest number of new jobs in the last 10 years that have been created are those of 'honorarium' workers - all paid 'honorariums' far below even the lowest minimum wage. Fifth, nearly half the working population unable to find work end up as low end self-employed producers and service providers living at best at subsistence level. And lastly, the virtual abolition of Grade D jobs in government employment, involving, according to present estimates a loss of nearly 20 percent of all direct government jobs, and their replacement by contract labour, adds the sixth dimension to wage pressure.

Low wages are not just central to the neo-liberal profit model but they have become central to the development model. In this model government outsources services and creates new avenues of profits and ends up replacing protected government jobs with workers on low pay and seeks to provide welfare services and extend anti-poverty programmes through these workers on poverty wages. Hence on the one hand, there is the largest section of working people employed on low wages, below the minimum wage, that live in poverty, squalor and in conditions of deprivation while on the other there is the emergence of a middle class whose incomes are rising and their consumption is beginning to match levels of developed economies. This wage model is the single most important factor contributing to the rising income inequality.

It is today widely recognised, even by the International Monetary Fund, that persistent wage inequality and low pay will continue to result in the persistence of the global crisis. In the context of this country it is clear that rising incomes of the top 20% in the economy is not sufficient to lift the economy out of the present state of stagflation and put it on a stable and sustainable high growth path. The low income of the remaining 80% of the working population has resulted in low demand as the vast majority simply does not have the capacity to consume. In fact about half of this section of the working population is dependent on the other half for their existence as producers and service providers of wage goods. Hence, the inability of low paid workers to consume not just affects demand in the economy, it triggers a further squeezing of the bottom 40% of the working population as they cannot pay an adequate price for their basic needs that allows for the dignified existence for the producers and providers of these needs.

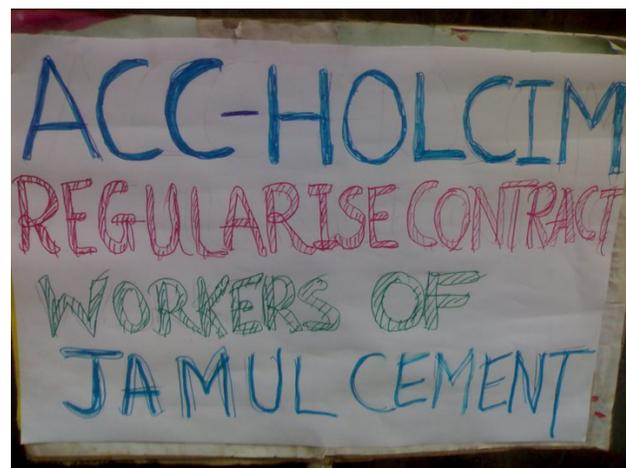
In light of the fact that middle class consumption is not enough to revive the economy it is important not just for the benefit of the working class but for the very sustenance and stability of the economy to address the wage question through an incomes policy. Despite the continuing struggles of NTUI and its affiliates and all other trade unions for an improved minimum wage and its stringent implementation, the fact remains that the system of minimum wages is broken too and is in complete disrepair. Even the lowest pay of a government employee far outstrips the minimum wage. In many states and in many employments, including industrial employment, the minimum wage has not been revised in years and in those cases where it has been done, it is arbitrary and not based on the clearly laid out principles laid out by the 15th ILC and the subsequent judgements of the Supreme Court. In most cases the rate of neutralisation of the minimum wage with inflation is also arbitrary. Governments promise to introduce a national minimum wage, below which no minimum wage must fall, has not been kept. And yet salaries of the managerial class in the private sector continue to rise and government has announced the 7th Pay Commission to address the emoluments of government employees. Its terms of reference, that are now available, make it clear that government has no intention of addressing the wage concerns of the vast numbers who are not employed today directly by government but who work for government. Nothing can be clearer than this - the wage concern of 80% of the working population is not on the agenda of parliamentary politics in the country as the country prepares for a general election to elect the 16th Lok Sabha.

It is this understanding that motivated the NTUI to resolve at its 3rd General Assembly to build a struggle for a Commission on Wages that advances the principle of a living wage for all workers and not just a section of the working population. This today is more urgent than ever before. We must build our struggle to achieve a wage commission with a legislative mandate to win a living wage.

AFFILIATE NEWS

PCSS Campaigns for Release of Union activists: *Baloda Bazar, 8 January 2014:* The Pragatisheel Cement Shramik Sangh (PCSS) has been under severe attack from the Swiss Multinational cement company, Holcim since 2010 for unionising contract workers at their Baloda Bazar plant. The contract workers at this unit in 2010 were not paid minimum wages, PF or even provided safety equipments. There have been a number of cases of death of workers on duty due to negligence

at the plant. The union led successful struggles for implementation of minimum wages, payment of PF and even won bonus for the contract workers. The PCSS, with a membership from the displaced and affected families from the villages notably Rawaan, Bhadrapaali, and Pounsari around the plant, has also supported the struggle of the plant affected villagers for rehabilitation.



Holcim illegally dismissed over 80 active union members in 2011. PCSS raised a dispute and filed a complaint against this victimisation and unfair labour practice and the ALC-Raipur warned the company that the licenses of its contractors would be cancelled, and was exhorted to reinstate the retrenched contract workers. Holcim management retaliated by filing false criminal cases against the union leadership, including against Com. Lakhman Sahu, the organising secretary of the union and Yogesh Sahu, Dhannu Ram Patel, Bhagwat Sahu, Thanu Ram Patel, Lala Ram Dhruv and Dilharan Dhruv.

On 8 January 2014, Com. Lakhman Sahu and the others surrendered in the court of the Chief Judicial Magistrate in District Baloda Bazar, Chhattisgarh.

The union has applied for bail consequently, which has been denied.

ASHA workers union wins a Rs 1,000 increase in honorarium: *Chandigarh, 9 January 2014:* The Punjab government on 9 January finally gave its approval to increase the honorarium of ASHA workers in the state by Rs 1,000 and directed the Health and Family Welfare department officials to implement the decision with immediate effect. The Chief Minister also directed the Health department to ensure that the incentive payment of the ASHA workers are paid on a fixed date every month through banks. This decision will benefit 16,000 ASHA workers in the state.

The Chief Minister Parkash Singh Badal also directed the Health department to provide rest rooms for ASHA workers in every government hospital of the state so

that they could perform their duty effectively. He further directed the department to explore the feasibility for providing Insurance Cover and Health care facilities, along with providing Mobile allowance to these workers. He also directed the Health department to provide uniforms for ASHA workers.

The sustained struggle of the ASHA workers and Facilitators Union, Punjab across the state led to these announcements. The union has been demanding for regularisation in the Health department under NRHM, with pay and benefits at par with the Central Government employee in the category of skilled workers and highly skilled workers respectively; payment by cheque; annual increments and promotions; earned leave and medical leave as per government norms; Identity cards, Uniforms with washing allowance, and monthly TA/DA on actual for attending monthly meetings called by the health ministry; Emergency and risk allowances; Bonus; Insurance cover of Rs. 2 lakh each with the premium borne by the Government; Pension at 50% of last drawn wages and Additional compensation for additional work done in the department.

Contract Municipal Workers protest in Mumbai:

Mumbai, 17 January 2014: 3000 contract municipal workers and members of Kachra Vahatuk Shramik Sangh (KVSS) from Mumbai, Maharashtra Municipal Kamgar Union from Thane and Nasik Mahanagar Palika Shramik Sangh from Nasik held a rally and public meeting at Azad Maidan, Mumbai demanding equal wages for equal work.



The Municipal Commissioners in Mumbai, Thane and Nasik have defied orders for the last 4 years of the State Labour Commissioner to pay equal wages as the permanent workers to the contract workers under the Contract Labour Regulation and Abolition Act. At present, the permanent workers get a monthly wage of Rs. 18,000 while a contract worker is paid a monthly wage of Rs. 8000 only.

A delegation of the three unions also submitted a memorandum to the Chief Minister.

Ashok Leyland union wins a settlement despite slowdown:

Chennai, 26 January 2014: Against all odds, the Ashok Leyland Employees Union, an affiliate of the WPTUC, has reached a 3 year wage settlement that provides for a weighted average increase in wage of Rs. 9,450 per worker. The hike ranges from Rs. 8,626 to Rs. 10,007 depending on scales. In 2010, the union had finalised an average increase in wage of Rs.7,300.

The union however agreed to an early retirement scheme in the plant. Over 400 workers at the Ennore plant are due for retirement by March 2015. The union succeeded in winning full wages and incentives for those opting for this early retirement scheme.

NFSRU included in the Industrial Tripartite Committee for Sales Promotion Employees:

New Delhi, 31 January 2014: The Ministry of Labour and Employment, Government of India through a circular (No.Z-13025/15/2010 – IR (PL)) dated 31 January 2014 constituted an Industrial Tripartite Committee for Sales Promotion Employees with NFSRU as one of the constituent workers' representative.

The Government has delayed the formation of this Committee for several years. The NFSRU even on 20 January 2014 had written to the Labour Minister urging to declare the formation of Tripartite Committee.

The NFSRU since 2011 has been demanding for a revision of the minimum pension under EPS to Rs. 1000/- per month and enhancing the wage ceiling for the purpose from Rs.6500/- to Rs.15000/- per month. Both the finance and Labour Ministry has approved the proposal and it is expected to be effected w.e.f. 1st April 2014.

Anganwadi Workers Win Retirement Benefits in Maharashtra:

24 February 2014, New Delhi: The Maharashtra Rajya Anganwadi Kruti Samiti, of which the NTUI affiliate Maharashtra Rajya Anganwadi Karmchari Mahasangh is the largest constituent, with a membership of over 2 lakh, after a month long strike won a lump sum retirement benefit of Rs.1 lakh to Anganwadi Workers (AWWs) and Rs.75,000 Anganwadi Helpers (AWHs) to be paid at the end of their service. The Government of Maharashtra made this announcement at the end of cabinet meeting on 5 February. This was one of the major demands by the women workers working in Anganwadis who, following this announcement, called off their 31 day long strike and resumed work today. This is one of the longest and largest strike of women workers in our country. Maharashtra's Anganwadi workers have been struggling for retirement benefits for over a decade.

This victory is a tribute to their tenacity and their patience in agitating their demands. This victory is an also an important landmark in the struggle for recognition of ‘honorary’ workers whose retirement, the right of every worker, has been ensured in some measure.

The government also promised to increase their honorarium from the existing Rs. 4050 and Rs. 2000 to AWWs and AWHs respectively in the next 15 days.



The Cabinet meeting on 23 February also approved an enhancement of the honorarium of Anganwadi workers and helpers from Rs 4050 to Rs 5000 and from Rs 2000 to Rs 2500 respectively. The honorarium of Anganwadi workers in a Mini-Anganwadi centre has been increased to Rs 2400 from Rs 1950. This hike would be effective from 1 April 2014.

NTUI holds press meet to Reaffirm need for trade union unity in winning a single wage agreement for tea plantation industry in West Bengal: *Siliguri, 5 February 2014:* Comrades Gautam Mody, General Secretary and Pradeep K Roy, National Secretary addressed a press meet in Siliguri to affirm NTUI’s support for the call of the Coordination Committee of Plantation Workers for a “United Struggle to Protect Earned Rights and Achieve a Just Wage”. The Paschim Banga Cha Bagan Shramik Karmachari Union (PBCSKU) is a constituent of this Coordination Committee.

The charter of demands of the Coordination Committee demands a single collective wage agreement for all tea plantation workers in the Darjeeling hills, and Dooars and Terai regions of West Bengal. The wage negotiations have become fraught with divisions created amongst the workers, along ethnic and regional lines, since the wage agreement of 2011.

The Government of West Bengal has systematically attempted to delegitimise the credibility of the united trade union movement since 2011 along with a

crackdown on trade unions including an attack of the right to freedom of association and with threats of banning strikes. The government has also sought to advantage the party of government by playing up the divisions between the ethnic political formations in the region and thereby opening up a parallel process of negotiation for the wage settlement. These efforts of government succeeded in putting in place two separate wage agreements with differential wages for the Darjeeling hills and for the Dooars and Terai regions that were supported by the ethnic and regional political formations along with an additional hour of work each day by way of this separate agreement for the Darjeeling hills.

Along with pressing the charter of demands of the Coordination Committee, the NTUI also demanded the notification of minimum wages for tea plantations in West Bengal to further the struggle for minimum wages launched by PBCSKU and called upon all organizations of tea plantation workers to join the united struggle for a just wage.

Bajaj Akurdi plant workers get Rs 10,000 increase in wages: *Pune, 12 February 2014:* The Vishwakalyan Kamgar Sanghatana (VKS) won an increase of Rs. 10,000 in the wages of workers at the Akurdi plant of Bajaj Auto. This has renewed hope for achieving a wage settlement at the Chakan plant too. The Akurdi plant has only 130 workers while the Chakan plant employs 950 permanent workers besides over 1,000 contract workers and trainees.



The negotiations for wage revision at the Chakan plant reached a deadlock leading to the 50-day work stoppage that ended in August 2013. The Bajaj management has offered an increase of Rs 10,000 to Chakan workers in a phased manner. The VKS unit at the Chakan plant has declared that they would go on an indefinite hunger strike if the company management does not honour its commitment on reinstatement of the 20 victimised union members.

39th AGB of AWBSRU held successfully in Kolkata: *Kolkata, 24 February 2014:* The All West Bengal Sales Representatives' Union (AWBSRU) held its 39th Annual General Body meeting from 21-23 February 2014 at Mahajati Sadan, Kolkata and called for "Freedom from inequality, through militancy and Unity".



In the 40 years of the AWBSRU's struggle, the Indian pharmaceutical industry has evolved from a nascent industry to a world leader in the production of high quality, low cost generic drugs. This growth has been built on the back of contract manufacturing and outsourcing. The price for producing low cost generics in order to capture the global market has been effectively shifted on to the workers, both in manufacturing and as well as in services. The AWBSRU has led from the front in bringing into the union fold both contract workers and workers employed in small and medium enterprises while continuing a broad based campaign for a just minimum wage for all employments that has been yet another unifying force for unions across industries and sectors. The union has also played an important role in building the critical link between the pharmaceutical industry workers, the healthcare system and citizens as recipients of healthcare.

Over 2000 members from across the state participated in the three days conference. The opening session was addressed by representatives of the TUCI, IFTU, AICCTU, Shramik Sangrami Mancha, Service Doctors Forum, Association of Health Service Doctors, Medical Service Centre, Shramajibi Swasthya Udyog, FAMA, Novarties Employees Union. Resolutions on Minimum Wages for Medical and Sales Representatives, price rise of essential commodities, aggression of MNCs and monopolist in pharma industry, attack on marginal people were adopted unanimously.

Com. Shymal Ghosh and Com. Asish Kusum Ghosh were elected as President and General Secretary. The

General Body called for further strengthening of the organization to confront the intensified attack of state-industry nexus. NTUI extended its solidarity by sending a message which was read out in the AGM.



Mid-day meal workers union rally for better pay: *Jalandhar, 24 February 2014:* Hundreds of members of the Mid Day Meal Workers Union, Punjab held a rally and demonstration at Jalandhar demanding better wages and conditions of work. The MDM workers in the state are paid Rs 1200 monthly, for 10 months of the year. The union has submitted its Charter of Demands to the state government several times and no action has been taken. Instead, the state government has now decided to outsource the provision of mid day meals in city schools to agencies and thereby terminate the services of the MDM workers in these schools.

The MDM workers union is demanding a minimum wage of Rs 7028 for MDM cooks and Rs 6428 for the assistants, for all 12 months in a year; to stop outsourcing of MDM provisioning; and to immediately fill all vacant positions. The meeting was addressed by Comrades Lakhwinder Kaur Faridkot, the president, Mamta Sharma, the general secretary of the union along with state NTUI leaders Comrades Makkhan Singh, Nachattar Singh, Germanjit Singh, Harinder Dosanjh and others.

The union held successive protests at Muktasar, Ghumaan burning effigies of the Chief Minister.

CAMPAIGN NEWS

POSCO gets clearance after 8 years: *New Delhi, 10 January 2014:* Within three weeks of Veerappa Moily replacing Jayanthi Natarajan as environment minister, the environment ministry approved the \$ 12.6 billion Posco steel plant in Orissa, the biggest foreign direct investment in India. The proposed 12 million-tonnes-per-year plant has been stuck for more than eight years due to delays in getting clearances and acquiring land. The steel plant got the green signal after it was delinked

from the port project.

The POSCO integrated steel plant and port project was to originally come up on some 4,000 acres in the coastal town of Jagatsinghpur in Orissa. Strong opposition over land acquisition issues has, however, forced the project now to a 2,700-acre site and the limited conditionality that POSCO must spend 5% of its total investment on "enterprise social commitments".

India-US ties under stress over compulsory licensing of drugs: 23 February 2014: The US Chamber of Commerce on 8 February called upon the US government to designate India as a Priority Foreign Country (PFC). Under the US Trade Act, a Priority Foreign Country is given to "foreign countries that deny adequate and effective" protection of intellectual property rights (IPR) or "fair and equitable market access" to US persons relying upon IPR protection.

The Government of India decided to deny visas to the officials of the US International Trade Commission (US ITC) planning to visit India to investigate India's trade and industrial practices, especially related to laws governing IPR. The US ITC is a quasi-judicial independent federal body that advises the US President, the US trade representative and the Congress on trade matters. India considers the US' request to scrutinise its IPR regime as "objectionable and against national interest". A PFC status allows the US to impose unilateral sanctions against India for domestic laws which deny benefits to the US under any trade agreement.

India believes that this step of the US government is to protect the interest of pharmaceutical companies, including Pfizer, Bayer and Swiss pharma major Novartis (which has a strong presence in the US). Following the Novartis and the Bayer-Onyx cases, the US is very concerned that other countries like Brazil, China and South Africa might follow India's model of compulsory licensing.

The Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion (DIPP), under the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, has prepared a list of all cases since 1974 where the US has violated IPR laws, rejected patents and invoked compulsory licensing in sectors ranging from electronics to pharmaceuticals. The Government of India has refused to deal with the matter bilaterally and is open to discussion on such matters at multilateral platforms like the World Intellectual Property Organization and the World Trade Organization.

India and Israel sign Bilateral Security Relations Agreements: 27 February 2014: The Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India signed three agreements to further strengthen the bilateral security relations with

Israel. These agreements are Mutual Legal Assistance Treaty in Criminal Matters; Agreement on Protection of Classified Material and Agreement on Cooperation in Homeland and Public Security.



Fifth National Convention of the Right to Food Campaign: 1-3 March, Gujarat: New Delhi, 28 February 2014: The Fifth National Convention on the Right to Food and Work will be held at Sanand, near Ahmedabad on 1-3 March 2014. The last convention was held in Rourkela in 2010.

The 5th Convention aims to consolidate the gains of people's campaigns on issues of survival and build broad alliances in preparation to ensure the centrality of eliminating hunger, the right to food and livelihoods, and social protection as a political priority for the 2014 general elections and beyond.

The venue of the convention is:
Dalit Shakti Kendra
Nani Devati, Sanand-Bavla Road
District Sanand
Gujarat

NEWS UPDATE

Management goons assault auto workers in Gurgaon: 16 January 2014: Production at the Manesar-based auto parts manufacturing firm Munjal Kiriu came to a standstill on 14 January after its workers went on strike over the assault of some of their colleagues by management appointed bouncers on 13 January.

The bouncers attacked a group of over a dozen suspended employees protesting at the company's gate, severely injuring five of them. An FIR was registered on 14th evening against three top officials of the company, as well as 20 unidentified people, after scores of workers protested outside Manesar police station.

The company suspended 65 workers on the charge of inefficiency in December. Following the attack on the suspended workers, other workers of the company joined in the protest in support of their suspended colleagues and went on a tool-down strike. The management supposedly has agreed to reinstate 50 of the suspended workers but is refusing to reinstate all of them. The workers are demanding an independent union of their own choice. The management has refused it. Munjal Kiriu is one of the biggest suppliers of auto parts to Hero Motocorp and Maruti Suzuki India Ltd.

Chennai city Ramky safai workers walkout: 12 January 2014: Safai workers from Ramky Enviro Engineering in Chennai city struck work for 48 hours on 9 January 2014 for higher Pongal bonus. Nearly 360 compactor truck drivers from three city zones, are demanding a Rs. 5,000 festival bonus but the company has only offered Rs. 3,500.

Haryana government employees go on a three-day strike: Government cracks down on contract workers: Chandigarh, 21 January 2014: Over two lakh employees of Haryana government went on a three-day strike from 20 January even as the state imposed Section 144 to quell the agitation. Lashing out at the government, Haryana Karamchari Coordination Committee accused the government of trying to create differences between various unions of the employees. The Haryana Karamchari Coordination Committee is demanding abolishment of contractual system and outsourcing of work, filling up of vacancies, regularisation of part time employees, and cancellation of 3,519 permits to private bus operators, among other demands.

The Haryana government has initiated tough measures to deal with the strike by employees of power utilities, public health, health and other departments. The state government has issued directions to terminate the contracts of contractual employees in the Power Utilities and Haryana Roadways.

97% railway employees ready to go on strike over demands: New Delhi, 23 January 2014: All but three per cent of railway employees in the country are in favour of going on an indefinite strike to press for the fulfilment of a charter of demands which calls for, among other things, merger of DA with pay, guaranteed pension in lieu of the new pension scheme and improved grade pay for technicians, station masters, running staff, supervisors, etc. In a poll conducted across 4,000 centres across the country on 17 and 18 January as well as among the employees of the six production units, 97.36 of railways employees voted in favour of an indefinite strike.

Parateachers in Uttar Pradesh win Equal Pay for Equal Work: 29 January 2014: On 28 January 2014, Uttar Pradesh government passed a resolution to absorb over 1.70 lakh *Shiksha Mitras* in without Teacher Eligibility Test.

The para teachers draw an average monthly salary of Rs. 3000, whereas the regular teachers across the country are entitled to an approximate starting salary of Rs. 15,000 after the Sixth Pay Commission. A *Shiksha Mitra* in Uttar Pradesh is even paid less than their counterparts in the states of Uttarakhand, Rajasthan, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Delhi, Punjab and Bihar.

Further, in UP, the *Siksha Mitras* are paid for 11 months of the year while their counterparts in neighbouring Himachal Pradesh and Haryana are paid for 12 months. The monthly honorarium of a *Shiksha Mitra* in UP is Rs. 3500, which is less than the minimum wage of skilled labour in the state.



The Uttar Pradesh Prathamik Shiksha Mitra Sangh representing all shiksha mitras in the state, on 28 January 2014, organised a massive public in Lucknow. Around 1 Lakh Shiksha Mitras joined the rally coming from various parts of U.P. The key demands of the union are:

- Para-teachers be absorbed as regular teachers from their date of joining under the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan.
- The Teacher Eligibility Test (TET) is mandatory for teacher selection under the RTE Act. TET not to be made mandatory for para-teachers appointed prior to the RTE.
- Para-teachers be given all statutory rights and benefits under laws governing employment of teachers, including wages for 12 months in the year and paid leave as per government norms.
- Wages of Para-teachers be fixed in accordance to wage scales of regular teachers with similar experience and qualification.
- Para-teachers should be adequately compensated in lieu of all non-teaching additional work allocated to them such as election duties, socio-economic survey, etc.
- Clear direction should be prescribed for appointment after the training of shikshamitras is completed.

Mass Retrenchment in Novartis: Mumbai, 29 January 2014: 139 Medical Representatives (MRs) were summarily terminated by the global pharma giant Novartis for non-attainment of target as set by the company.

This is an effort of Novartis to show its displeasure to

the Government of India over certain clauses in the Drug Price Control Order (DPCO), 2013 and the amended Indian Patent Act (IPA). This is a replay of the termination of 35 employees by Indian Schering, an MNC, at the introduction of the DPCO in 1970. In the recent past, the denial of patent to Novartis for its anti-cancer drug “Glivec” by the Supreme Court also thwarted its expanding monopoly.

Haryana raises retirement age of anganwadi workers to 65 years: *Chandigarh, 30 January 2014:* Haryana Government has raised the retirement age of anganwadi workers, helpers and mini anganwadi workers from 60 to 65 years. There are over 51,000 anganwadi workers in the state.

Jan Jagram Rally of the MSWU reaches New Delhi: *31 January 2014:* Dismissed workers and their family members marched to Delhi and held a day long protest at Jantar Mantar on 31 January after a 16 day foot-march against injustice, which started on 15 January 2014 from Kaithal, Haryana. They marched 300 km through Kaithal, Jind, Rohtak, Jhajjar, Gurgaon in Haryana before reaching Delhi.



The MSWU provisional committee held protest demonstrations in front of the Maruti Suzuki factory in Gurgaon along with workers and the Gurgaon plant union as well as before the Maruti Suzuki Head Quarters in Vasant Kunj, New Delhi.

The MSWU continues their struggle for the release of the 148 arrested workers who have been denied bail, reinstatement of all terminated workers, and an impartial investigation into the incident of 18 July 2012.

Activists under attack for protesting the death of a minor Domestic Worker: *New Delhi, 31 January 2014:* Several activists, primarily women members of Gharelu Kaamgar Sanghatana, an organisation of domestic workers in the area, were lathi-charged, arrested and later released when they protested against the apathy of Haryana police at the death of a live-in domestic worker in Gurgaon. The girl was found hanging in the house on 29 January 2014.

The Haryana Police first refused to let the family of the girl file an FIR, even when her family suspected that the girl was raped and murdered. The Gharelu Kaamgar Sanghatana intervened and ensured that the police lodged the FIR under Sections 302 and 376 of the IPC, naming the employer and his two sons as primary suspects.

Pay of midday meal workers doubled to Rs 2,000 a month: *New Delhi, 1 February 2014:* The finance ministry has cleared the HRD ministry's proposal to double the monthly honorarium of the midday meal workers from Rs 1,000 to Rs 2,000. The decision will benefit 28.29 lakh MDM workers across the country. More than 82% of cook-cum-helpers are women, 25% belong to Scheduled Caste, 15% are Scheduled Tribe and 35% OBCs.

Supreme Court orders Sessions Court to expedite case of Maruti Suzuki workers: *New Delhi, 4 February 2014:* The Supreme Court on 3 February 2014 directed the Gurgaon Sessions Judge to dispose of the trial as expeditiously as possible. Considering the peculiar nature of the offence and the number of persons involved in this case, the apex court directed the Sessions Judge to take up the matter on day to day basis, if required and complete the examination of all eye-witnesses by 30.4.2014. The Supreme Court expressed no opinion on the merits of the bail petition.

Government sets up Seventh Pay Commission: *New Delhi, 5 February 2014:* The government on 4 February constituted the Seventh Central Pay Commission headed by former Supreme Court judge Justice Ashok Kumar Mathur that will affect about 50 lakh Central government employees, including those in Defence and Railways, and about 30 lakh pensioners.

A pay commission is set up every 10 years to review the salary of central government employees to take into account the impact of inflation and cost of living. Apart from increasing the pay scales the panel will also look at other suggestions related to working conditions and may also review the retirement age, which is current at 60 years. There is widespread demand to increase the retirement age to 62. The terms of reference of the seventh pay panel are, however, yet to be made public.

The panel will submit its report in two years and the recommendations would be implemented from 1 January 2016.

EPFO approves raising Provident Fund interest rate to 8.75%: *New Delhi, 6 February 2014:* The Employees Provident Fund Organisation decided to increase the rate of interest on Provident Fund deposits to 8.75% for 2013-14. In 2013-14, the EPFO is estimated to have earned Rs 20,796.96 crore of which

Rs 20,740 crore will be used to pay 8.5 per cent interest to its subscribers.

The EPFO also approved a proposal to provide a monthly minimum pension of Rs. 1,000, a decision that will immediately benefit about its 28 lakh pensioners. The pensionable salary will be calculated on the basis of average salary of the last 60 months instead of 12 months as provided in the EPS-95. Despite the objection by the trade union members of the Central Board of Trustees the methodology for computing pensionable salary was changed.

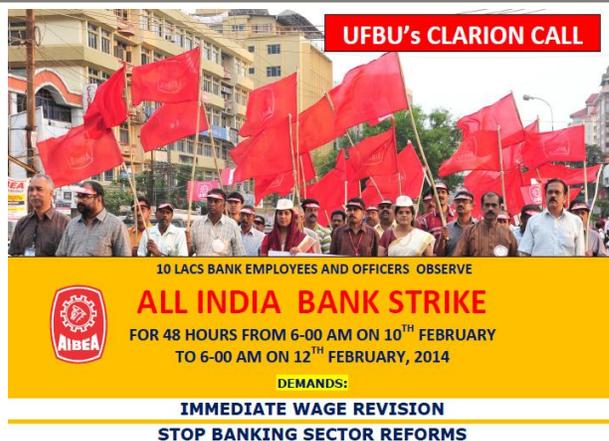
The CBT also decided to raise the monthly wage ceiling to Rs. 15,000 from Rs.6,500 by amending the Employee Provident Fund scheme, 1952.

Supreme Court upholds Majithia wage board recommendations: *New Delhi, 7 February 2014:* The Supreme Court upheld the recommendations made by the Justice Majithia Wage Board for Working Journalists and other Newspaper Employees in print media and dismissed challenges filed by the managements of various newspapers including Bennett, Coleman and Co. Ltd. (publisher of *The Times of India*), ABP Pvt. Ltd. (publisher of *Anandabazar Patrika*) and the Indian Newspaper Society (INS), among others.

A bench headed by Chief Justice P. Sathasivam held that, "The wages as revised/determined shall be payable from 11.11.2011 when the government of India notified the recommendations of the Majithia wage boards. All the arrears up to March 2014 shall be paid to all eligible persons in four equal instalments within a period of one year from today and continue to pay the revised wages from April 2014 onwards."

Under the Working Journalists and other Newspaper Employees (Conditions of Service) and Miscellaneous Provisions Act, 1955, the Union government through the Ministry of Labour and Employment notified in November 2011 the recommendations increasing the salaries paid to all staff. The latest Majithia wage board recommendation increases salaries in some cases by 200% of prevailing levels.

Public Sector Banks go on a two day nationwide strike for wage revision: *12 February 2014:* The United Forum of Bank Unions (UFBU) called for a two day strike from 10 February to press for wage revision. The wage revision of public sector bank employees has been due since November 2012. The UFBU is an umbrella organisation of nine bank employee and officer unions. There are 27 public sector banks in the country with a combined employee strength of about 8 lakh.



In a conciliation meeting held on 6 February with the Chief Labour Commissioner, the UFBU has rejected the Indian Banks' Association's (IBA) offer of a 10 per cent wage hike. The IBA represents bank managements. Earlier the employees of public sector banks had gone on a nationwide strike for a day on 18 December 2013 after discussions with the IBA on wages on 14 December had failed.

AAI employees to hold ballot to decide on general strike: *Mumbai, 14 February 2014:* Employees of state-run Airports Authority of India (AAI) conducted a "strike ballot" on 10 February to decide a general strike against the decision of the government for privatisation of airports. The government had in September 2013 decided to allow private parties to pick up 100 per cent equity stake in operation and management of six airports - Chennai, Kolkata, Guwahati, Ahmedabad, Jaipur and Lucknow - through the PPP mode.

The date of strike will be decided on the outcome of the mandate. The Airport Authority Employees Union has warned that privatisation will only lead to higher airport taxes and higher airfares, as has happened in the case of Mumbai and Delhi airports.

The ballot could not be conducted in Chennai. The result excluding Chennai was 96% in support of the strike.

CPSE employees declined in 2012-13: Survey: *20 February 2014:* The Public Enterprises Survey (2012-13) brought out by the Department of Public Enterprises, Ministry of Heavy Industries & Public Enterprises, on the performance of Central Public Sector Enterprises (CPSEs) shows that the number of people working in the country's public sector enterprises declined in 2012-13. According to the survey, there were 277 CPSEs in 2012-13, out of which 229 were in operation and the remaining 48 were under construction.

LEGAL UPDATE

Land Acquisition Act and Draft Rules Notified: The Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition and Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act, 2013 came into force on 1 January 2014. It received the assent of the President on 27 September 2013.

The Act regulates the process of land acquisition and provides for rehabilitation and resettlement of affected families. The Draft Rules for Social Impact Assessment (SIA) and consent were notified on 31 December 2013. The key features of the Draft Rules, as notified are:

- **Social Impact Assessment:** The Act provides for an SIA to examine: (a) whether the acquisition serves a public purpose, (b) the number of families that will be affected, and (c) the social impact of the project. It also mentions certain cases where an SIA need not be conducted.
- **Consent:** Land is acquired by the government for government, private and public-private partnership projects with public purpose. Consent is not required for government projects. Private projects require the consent of at least 80% of the affected families. Public-private partnership projects require the consent of at least 70% of the affected families. The Draft Rules specify the procedure for obtaining the consent of gram sabhas and affected land owners.
- **Rehabilitation and Resettlement (R&R):** The government acquiring land must ensure that the following are provided to individuals whose consent is sought: (a) SIA report, (b) initial R&R package being offered, (c) list of rights current enjoyed by the village and its residents under various legislations, and (d) a written statement by the collector stating that there will be no consequences if consent is denied, etc.

MoRD directs 150 days of work under MGNREGA for STs in forest areas: The Ministry of Rural Development issued a directive to states to provide 150 days of work under the MGNREGA for Scheduled Tribes (STs) living in forest areas. The additional 50 days of employment will be given to individuals who have been given pattas under the Forest Rights Act, 2006. According to the MoRD, the additional days given through this directive will allow households to undertake activities such as land-levelling and plantation on these lands to make them more productive.

MoEF modifies norms for environment clearances: The Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) has modified the norms for environment clearances.

- **Clearance for power stations:** The forest and

environment clearance for power stations of ultra-mega power projects will no longer be linked to the clearance of their captive coal blocks.

- **Linear projects:** Linear projects will receive forest clearance without procuring consent of all gram sabhas of villages that they pass through.
- **Expansion of mines:** Coal mines with an annual capacity of up to 8 million tonnes may expand capacity by up to 50% without holding public hearings. This exemption will apply to one-time capacity expansion in projects that do not involve land beyond the existing lease area. Until now, public hearings were required if the capacity was to be expanded by 25% or more.
- **Re-categorisation of projects for grant of clearance:** The Environment Impact Assessment Notification, 2006 (EIA) mandates prior environment clearance for projects listed in its Schedule. Category A projects shall obtain environment clearance from the central government and category B projects from the concerned State Level Environment Impact Assessment Authority. Category B projects are further categorised as B1 and B2. The projects categorised as B1 require an EIA Report for appraisal and have to undergo the process of public consultation. Projects categorised as B2 will require only a pre-feasibility report.

Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending) Bill, 2014 passed by Rajya Sabha: 19 February 2014: The Rajya has passed the Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending) Bill, 2014. The Bill provides for protection of livelihoods rights, social security of street vendors, regulation of urban street vending in the country and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto. The Lok Sabha had passed the Bill on 6 September 2013. The Bill provides for constitution of a Town Vending Authority (TVA) in each Local Authority, which is the fulcrum of the Bill, for implementing the provisions of the Bill. In order to ensure participatory decision making for aspects relating to street vending activities, the TVA is required to have representation of officials and non-officials and street vendors, including women vendors with due representation from SC, ST, OBC, Minorities and persons with disabilities. It has been provided that 40% members of the TVA will be from amongst street vendors to be selected through election, of which one-third shall be women.

MGNREGA wages revised: 10 February 2014: The revision in the MGNREGA wage rate indexed to the Consumer Price Index for Agricultural Labour (CPIAL) will come into effect from 1 April 2014 and will prevail for the year 2014-15.

The rural development ministry meanwhile has called for amendment to the MGNREGA to ensure that there is parity in wages under MGNREGA and the Minimum Wages Act. The ministry has proposed that wages under the two Acts be reviewed every five years through a consensus between the Centre and the states and that there should be no arbitrary increase in state wage rates.

	State	01-Apr-13	01-Apr-14
1	Assam	152.00	167.00
2	Andhra Pradesh	149.00	169.00
3	Arunachal Pradesh	135.00	155.00
4	Bihar	138.00	158.00
5	Gujarat	147.00	167.00
6	Haryana	214.00	236.00
7	Himachal Pradesh		
	Non-Scheduled Areas	138.00	154.00
	Scheduled Areas	171.00	193.00
8	Jammu & Kashmir	145.00	157.00
9	Karnataka	174.00	191.00
10	Kerala	180.00	212.00
11	Madhya Pradesh	146.00	157.00
12	Maharashtra	162.00	168.00
13	Manipur	153.00	175.00
14	Meghalaya	145.00	153.00
15	Mizoram	148.00	170.00
16	Nagaland	135.00	155.00
17	Orissa	143.00	164.00
18	Punjab	184.00	200.00
19	Rajasthan	149.00	163.00
20	Sikkim	135.00	155.00
21	Tamil Nadu	148.00	167.00
22	Tripura	135.00	155.00
23	Uttar Pradesh	142.00	156.00
24	West Bengal	151.00	169.00
25	Chattisgarh	146.00	157.00
26	Jharkhand	138.00	158.00
27	Uttaranchal	142.00	156.00
28	Goa	178.00	195.00
29	Andaman & Nicobar		

	Andaman	198.00	222.00
	Nicobar	210.00	235.00
30	Dadar & Nagar Haveli	175.00	182.00
31	Daman & Diu	150.00	170.00
32	Lakshadweep	166.00	195.00
33	Pondicherry	148.00	167.00
34	Chandigarh	209.00	227.00

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

Pakistani women health workers protest: *Peshawar, 30 December 2013:* Lady Health Workers (LHW) programme employees in various parts of Pakistan are campaigning for job regularisation and outstanding wages. On 30 December 2013, scores of women workers blocked a main road in the provincial capital Peshawar demanding salaries outstanding for the last four months.

There are over 1 lakh women workers employed in the LHW programme across Pakistan, providing a range of crucial health services, including vaccinations. 14,000 LHWs are yet to be regularised in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

About 150 LHW workers also held a sit-in protest outside the Prime Minister Secretariat over their demands. About 25,000 LHW employees in Sindh province have also threatened to boycott the child vaccination campaign if their pending salaries were not paid by 15 January.

The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government has announced a Rs. 2,000 increase in the minimum wage for workers and fixed it at Rs10,000 per month with effect from 1 July 2014. The LHWs are paid Rs. 7000 a month.

Bangladesh Accord on factory safety inspection standards announced: *15 January 2014:* The technical team of the Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh, signed between IndustriALL, UNI Global Union and more than 120 global garment companies, has finalised the standards to be used for factory inspections. The standards cover fire, electrical, and building safety and all factories producing for Accord signatory brands will be inspected for compliance against them.

The standards are largely based on the Bangladesh National Building Code . The Accord is committed to inspect 1500 factories by September 2014 for fire, electrical, and building safety. Results of the inspections and information on necessary remediation will be published on the Accord website.

After months of diplomatic tension, governments of Sri Lanka and India release fishermen: 17 January 2014: In a decision to create a conducive atmosphere before the scheduled talks between fishermen associations of India and Sri Lanka on 20 January in Chennai in a bid to resolve their issues, Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, J Jayalithaa ordered the release of 179 Sri Lankan fishermen lodged in Tamil Nadu jails, mostly arrested for trespassing into Indian waters on 12 January.

Shops in Nagapattinam and Nagore had remained closed on 21 December in response to a 12 hour strike call given by the Chamber of Commerce and Traders Association in solidarity with protesting fishermen demanding release of 210 of their counterparts arrested by Sri Lankan Navy over the past few months. Over 3000 fisher-folk have been on an indefinite fast since 21 December.

On 13 January, two courts in Sri Lanka ordered the release of 163 Tamil Nadu fishermen, arrested by the Sri Lankan navy in the past two months and lodged in prisons there.

Marine fishery resources have been the sustenance for fisher people communities in both Tamil Nadu and Sri Lanka. The battle over fishing in the Palk Straits especially for tuna, prawns, lobsters, blue swimming crabs and cuttlefish, has snowballed into a major diplomatic row between two countries.

Violation of maritime border by Indian trawlers has affected the livelihood of Lankan fishermen besides depriving them of financial profits and foreign exchange earnings. This fishing war has not only strained relations between India and Sri Lanka but also put the livelihood and lives of fishing communities of both countries in peril. Fishing is the only livelihood available to the fishermen of Tamil Nadu and northern Sri Lanka. Both prefer to fish near the Katchatheevu Island area in the strait, where fish reserves are said to be abundant due to presence of deep waters and the rocky formation. For Sri Lankan fishermen it is within their maritime boundary whereas for the Indian fishermen, crossing the boundary makes their act 'illegal'. Indian fishermen, who have traditionally fished in these waters view the maritime boundary as a human creation not sensitive to their livelihood concern.

The problem is however rooted in an intricate mix of several factors. First, the sea along the Indian coast is shallow and possibilities of fish reserve is low, partly because of overfishing. Second, the steady upsurge of Indian trawlers partly due to the relief funds doled out to Indian fishermen in the aftermath of the 2004 tsunami, lead to over-fishing as well as damage nets of Sri Lankan fisher people. Also, the problem can be

attributed to the closeness of shores of both countries to the international maritime border. The Palk Strait, which is the area of dispute, is just 22 miles of water that separates the northern coast of Sri Lanka from the southeast coast of India.

ILO releases Global Employment trends Report 2014: Geneva, 21 January 2014: In 2013, an estimated 375 million workers lived on less than US\$1.25 a day, compared to 600 million in the early 2000s – a 12 per cent drop per year, on average. But progress has stalled, and in 2013, the number of workers in extreme poverty declined by only 2.7 per cent globally according to the ILO Global Employment Trends 2014 report.

This trend reflects a peak in vulnerable employment, which the ILO defines as the sum of own account workers and contributing family workers. The number of people in vulnerable employment expanded by around 1 per cent in 2013, well above the 0.2 per cent growth rates during the years prior to the financial crisis.

For many people in the developing world, vulnerable and informal jobs remain the only work available. In most cases, those jobs entail low pay, limited job security, poor working conditions and little or no social protection. Informal employment remains widespread in most developing countries even though regional variations are sizeable. Informality rates are particularly high in South and South-East Asia, where they reach up to 90 per cent of total employment in some countries. Even though progress in reducing poverty has been strongest in these regions, a high incidence of informal employment is likely to constitute a barrier to a sustainable reduction in poverty.

According to the ILO, the uneven economic recovery and successive downward revisions in economic growth projections have had an impact on the global employment situation. Almost 202 million people were unemployed in 2013 around the world, an increase of almost 5 million compared with the year before. This reflects the fact that employment is not expanding sufficiently fast to keep up with the growing labour force.

The bulk of the increase in global unemployment is in the East Asia and South Asia regions, which together represent more than 45 per cent of additional jobseekers, followed by Sub-Saharan Africa and Europe. By contrast, Latin America added fewer than 50,000 additional unemployed to the global number – or around 1 per cent of the total increase in unemployment in 2013.

If current trends continue, global unemployment is set to worsen further, albeit gradually, reaching more than

215 million jobseekers by 2018. During this period, around 40 million net new jobs would be created every year, which is less than the 42.6 million people that are expected to enter the labour market every year.

A faster recovery in global labour markets is held back by a deficit of aggregate demand. In this respect, the fiscal consolidation currently under way in many advanced economies constitutes a drag on faster expansion of output growth, in addition to weak private consumption. This report shows that a rebalancing of macroeconomic policies and increased labour incomes would significantly improve the employment outlook.

Charges dropped against Fijian hotel union leaders for illegal strike at Starwood hotels: 5 February 2014: About 300 employees of the two hotels owned by the global Starwood Hotels group - Sheraton Fiji Resort and Westin Denarau Island Resort and Spa - on Denarau Island in Nadi, Fiji went on a spontaneous strike on New Year's Eve over work conditions and against the unilateral withdrawal of their staff benefits. The management agreed to negotiate and the workers returned to work.

The military dictatorship in Fiji however, declared the strike illegal and on 9 January, the six union leaders from the National Union of Hospitality Catering and Tourism Industries were arrested and charged with "unlawful strike". Dan Urai, who is also President of the Fiji Trades Union Congress was arrested. Though released on 5 February after massive protests, the bail conditions include not repeating the "offence" of calling a strike. If negotiations do not resolve the dispute and the union decides to hold another strike, their leaders can be arrested once again.

Ansell workers rally and show strength in Sri Lanka: 20 February 2014: 294 workers in the Biyagama Free Trade Zones, near Colombo, were fired in October 2013 when they struck work in support of 11 terminated colleagues and trade union representatives at the Australian multinational Ansell, maker of surgical and industrial gloves.

Large purchasers of Ansell products include national, regional and local governments, military, health care institutions (hospitals, clinics, nursing homes, home-care companies), correctional institutions, security agencies and companies, safety equipment supply houses, laboratory supply houses, and retailers.

Athula Kamal, branch president of the Free Trade Zones and General Services Employees Union (FTZGSEU), has worked at Ansell for more than 20 years as a machine operator. He was summarily terminated on 11 November, without any disciplinary inquiry. The only reason given for the termination was that he had

insinuated to police that management was involved when two men on a motorbike assaulted him. Since his termination, 10 more workers have been summarily dismissed, including other key branch union office bearers. Contract agency workers have replaced all suspended and dismissed workers.

The labour commissioner has ruled that Athula and the others should be reinstated. When the management refused, workers launched a strike in October, 2013 after which close to 300 workers were terminated.

Lower courts have ruled in favour of reinstatement of the dismissed workers, but the Supreme Court suspended the judgment and instructed Ansell instead to negotiate a settlement with the union.

Wave of strikes by Egyptian textile workers: 22 February 2014: Over 20,000 textile workers are on strike for higher wages and better working conditions at Egypt's largest state-owned textile company in Mahalla. The workers have been on strike since 10 February to demand the government pay the promised minimum wage of 1,200 Egyptian pounds and outstanding profit-sharing bonuses for two months.

Several thousand textile workers from 16 affiliated companies also joined the strike in solidarity with the Mahalla workers.



Cambodian security forces shoot striking garment workers: Phnom Penh, 24 February 2014: A month after the brutal police crackdown on striking Cambodian garment workers that left at least five people dead, scores injured and at least 23 detained, facing serious criminal charges, the garment workers unions are gearing up for another strike in March. The arrested have been kept in the country's toughest jail, Correctional Centre 3, outside the capital Phnom Penh, where their relatives have been unable to contact them.

The unions are demanding a monthly wage of \$160 while the Ministry of Labour has announced a monthly minimum wage of \$95. About, 5 lakh workers, mostly

young women are employed in Cambodia's fast-growing garment sector. The strike began on 24 December 2013 when the government proposed to double minimum monthly wage from the existing \$80 to \$160 over the next five years upto 2018, starting with an 18 percent rise to \$95 in April 2014. Garment workers unions rejected this and demanded the whole \$160 immediately.

On 20 February, representatives of global brands Puma, Gap and H&M met with the government expressed their concern over long term viability of sourcing from Cambodia. This will act as an added threat on the government for loss of business and further aggravate the repression. The search for lower cost of manufacturing of global brands has led to unparalleled repression and exploitation of workers in the global south. Cambodia, it must be noted, hosts the Better Factories programmes that grew out of a trade agreement between the United States and Cambodia, under which the US promised Cambodia better access to US markets in exchange for improved working conditions in the garment sector. The ILO was requested to establish a project to help the sector make and maintain these improvements.

Workers from more than 200 factories boycotted overtime work on 24 February. At 4pm, thousands of workers poured out of their factories as part of their ongoing calls for a \$160 monthly minimum wage and the release of 21 men arrested during a strike last month. The workers have decided not to work overtime until Friday to urge the government to find a resolution to their demands.



Panel decides Rana Plaza compensation: Only 5 out of 27 global brands commit to pay compensation: 24 February 2014: The Bangladesh government on 29 January finalised a set of recommendations after a 31-member panel gave its report on the worst industrial disaster. The committee recommended Tk 14.5 lakh for the dead and missing workers and the permanently disabled ones, Tk 7.5 lakh for those who have lost one limb, Tk 4.5 lakh for workers needing long-term treatment and Tk 1.5 lakh for the traumatised survivors.

The victims who have already received a certain sum from the Prime Minister's Fund will receive the balance of their respective compensation package.

The calculation of the compensation violates the ILO standard, according to which, in case of death the worker's family is entitled to Tk 25 lakh. The permanently disabled workers should receive more than Tk 25 lakh, the recoverable injured ones Tk 15 lakh and those with minor injuries Tk 5-10 lakh.

The whole compensation process is supposed to be completed within the next six months.

Meanwhile on 3 February, the High Court rejected the bail petition of Sohel Rana, the owner of Rana Plaza that collapsed on 24 April 2013 last year killing more than 1,100 people.

Only five of the 27 global clothing brands linked to the Rana Plaza factory have committed to paying into a compensation fund for the victims. Inditex, Mango, Canada's Loblaw, Denmark's Mascot and El Corte of Spain are the brands that have committed to the fund and will raise \$40m in time for the anniversary of the Rana Plaza factory disaster in April.

Several big British brands, including Primark and Matalan, are among the companies that have not paid into the fund, although Primark has paid the wages of workers laid off after the disaster. Other big brands connected to the factory include Walmart, Benetton and JC Penney.



Korean workers strike against attack on Trade Union Rights under the Park Government: Seoul, 25 February 2014: Over 40,000 members of the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU) turned out in force at Seoul Plaza on 25 February to demand the resignation of President Park Geun-hye. Similar rallies were held in 12 other cities earlier in the day. In the morning, members of the Korean Railroad Workers Union staged a one-day walkout.

The Park Government completed one year on 25 February 2014. The KCTU, along with organisations of peasants, urban poor, small shop keepers, students and youth under the banner of “Organising Committee of 25 February People’s Strike” gave a call for a nationwide strike against the unrelenting attack on human and trade union rights and the sustained undermining of democracy in the country.

The Park government has in the last one year,

- Denied legal status to the Korean Government Employees Union (KGEU), which represents 140,000 public officials. The government returned the union’s establishment report on the ground that it allows union membership of 135 dismissed workers.
- Deregistered the Korean Teachers and Education Workers Union (KTU) when it rejected the government’s recommendation to exclude dismissed workers from its membership. The union has been protesting against the governments’ competition oriented education policy and distortion of the country’s history.
- Imprisoned 4 leaders of Korean Federation of Public Services and Transportation Workers (KPTU)-affiliated Korean Railway Workers Union (KRWU), who led a 23-day-long strike against railway privatisation in December 2013. Disciplinary proceedings against KRWU members and officers who participated in the strike are on and the union’s bank account has been frozen.
- Imprisoned the Chair of the Korean Metal Workers’ Union (KMWU) Ssangyong Motor Branch for protesting the tearing down of the workers’ protest tent remembering the 24 Ssangyong Motor dead workers and family members.
The Seoul High Court on 7 February 2014 ruled that the accounts of Ssangyong Motor’s were falsified and the mass dismissals unjustified.
- Ordered precarious workers of the KMWU Hyundai Motors Ulsan Irregular Workers’ Local to pay a record 9 billion KRW (9 million USD) to the Hyundai Motor Company for “damages” to compensate the company’s potential and actual losses from work stoppages asking for wage increases and calling on Hyundai Motor to accept the historic Supreme Court ruling recognizing a direct employment relationship with Hyundai Motor. The union local chair who led the strike has been imprisoned and over a hundred union members fired for that strike are seek reinstatement.
- Illegally raided the KCTU office on 22 December 2013, without a search warrant. The police unlawfully and forcibly pushed into the union headquarters building to execute unjust arrest

warrants against KRWU leaders, destroying union property in the process. Police indiscriminately arrested protestors outside, using pepper spray. In total, 138 were arrested including the General Secretary of the KCTU and other 2 central leaders, and the President of the Korean Teachers and Education Workers Union (KTU), the Korean Federation of Public Services and Transportation Workers’ Unions (KPTU).

Greek port workers strike over privatization plans:
Athens, 26 February 2014: Greek dock workers across the country staged a walked out in a 24-hour strike to protest plans to sell a stake in the Piraeus Port Authority, the country's largest port.

Hundreds of striking port workers gathered in central Athens and marched to Parliament for a protest rally. Privatizing state-held assets is a key part of Greece's international bailout agreement. The port workers' strike was timed to coincide with a Parliament discussion on the Piraeus stake sale.

PRESS STATEMENT

Join the United Struggle to Protect Earned Rights and Achieve a Just wage: *New Delhi, 11 January 2014:* The New Trade Union Initiative joins the call of the Coordination Committee of Plantation Workers for a “United Struggle to Protect Earned Rights and Achieve a Just Wage” for all tea plantation workers in the Darjeeling hills, and Dooars and Terai regions of West Bengal. The Workers’ Convention, held at Mitra Sammilani Hall in Siliguri today, attended by representatives of all 17 union constituents of the Coordination Committee, endorsed the Charter of Demands for the forthcoming round of tripartite negotiations on wage agreement for the three year period effective from 1 April 2014.

The Convention called for the immediate reopening of the closed plantations of Dheklapara, Bandapani, Dalsinghpara, Red Bank, Raipur as well as the tea estates of Tea Development Corporation in the Darjeeling hills and the recently closed estate of Sachindra Chandra and all other closed plantations in the region and the implementation of government programmes in these plantations until such time as they are closed.

Given the spiralling inflation that has drastically eroded the already abysmally low wages existing in the tea plantations resulting in acute distress of the workers, the Coordination Committee condemned the blatant violation of the 2011 tripartite agreement for implementation of payment of Variable Dearness

Allowance and called for immediate and urgent implementation of it. The Government of West Bengal has looked the other way as the employers have violated the agreement with impunity and failed to implement the clauses on VDA in the agreement within six months of the agreement. The Coordination Committee also called for lifting the ceiling on the neutralisation factor for VDA and demanded for 100% neutralisation with the Consumer Price Index for industrial workers.

The existing mechanism of wage determination reflects an assumption that the non-cash component of wage is not a payment for the 8 hours of labour that the workers work when in fact it is an unambiguous component of the wage. Employers portray it as a dole payout. Wage for equal hours of work and following the same productivity norms must be equal for both men and women workers as required under the Equal Remuneration Act. However, under the present system the non cash component of wage for women workers is less than male workers. For women workers, their non-worker husband is not considered a dependent and hence not covered in the non-cash wage payout, whereas for a male worker, their non-worker wife would be considered a dependent and covered for the non-cash wage payout. This discrimination has further impoverished the tea worker families given the increasing feminisation of the plantation working population. The Convention called for an end to all such discrimination in wages between men and women workers.

The Convention also called for a review of the system of productivity linked wage imposed on the workers at the time of crisis in the industry. The inability of workers to meet productivity levels specified in the case of a plantation is not only linked to work intensity but also to the availability of leaves to be plucked in the plantations. Thus, even with increased intensity of work, non-availability of leaves especially in the lean season is cause for difficulty in reaching productivity levels. Non-availability of leaves is however directly linked to lack of investment in tea bushes by the owners – the burden of which is pushed on to the workers. The desperation of workers to meet the productivity level (quota) to earn the basic wage is coercing workers to get their children to drop-out from school and join their parents at work so that there are more hands to reach the productivity target.

The abysmally low wage in the tea plantations is leading to large scale out-migration from the plantations. While on one hand young girls and boys have migrated to cities in search of work, on the other, most men from tea worker families are increasingly seeking work outside the plantations for higher wages leading to both absenteeism and even non-availability of

badli workers. Women workers are hence being forced to perform many hazardous tasks that were earlier not performed by women. In many plantations, more than 50% workers in the factory are today women. Women are also being employed in difficult pruning tasks. Given the changing nature of work of women, the Convention called for a 4 month maternity leave along with improved crèche facilities at every estate. The convention also decided to press the demand for a Group hospital in the plantations.

The convention ratified the foregoing demands in order to build a united struggle in the forthcoming round of negotiations. The constituent unions of the Coordination Committee in the Workers Convention while ratifying the Charter called upon all trade unions of plantation workers to join this united struggle. Divisions within the trade union movement based on regional or ethnic identity have compromised and weakened the collective bargaining power of the working class. The lesson learnt from the last round of negotiations is that regional agreements fail to address the concern of the workers both in the region as well as in the industry. The need of the hour is to build a united militant movement to fight the onslaught of capital.

NTUI calls upon all unions of tea plantation workers to join the call of the Coordination Committee of Tea Plantation Workers for a United Struggle for a Just Wage.

NTUI Convention on Workers' Charter

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**Indian Society of International Law
9 Bhagwan Das Road
New Delhi**

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for the New Trade Union Initiative**
B-137, Dayanand Colony, First Floor, Lajpat Nagar – IV,
New Delhi–110024, Phone: 011-26214538/ 26486931,
Fax: 011-26486931
Email:secretariat@ntui.org.in
Website: ntui.org.in